Building community: Anglo-Catholicism and social action

Jeremy Morris

Some years ago the *Guardian* reporter Stuart Jeffries spent a day with a Salvation Army couple on the Meadows estate in Nottingham. When he asked them why they had gone there, he got what to him was obviously a baffling reply: "It's called incarnational living. It's from John chapter 1. You know that bit about 'Jesus came among us.' It's all about living in the community rather than descending on it to preach."[1] It is telling that the phrase 'incarnational living' had to be explained, but there is all the same something a little disconcerting in hearing from the mouth of a Salvation Army officer an argument that you would normally expect to hear from the Catholic wing of Anglicanism. William Booth would surely have been a little disconcerted by that rider 'rather than descending on it to preach', because the early history and missiology of the Salvation Army, in its marching into working class areas and its street preaching, was *precisely* about cultural invasion, expressed in language of challenge, purification, conversion, and 'saving souls', and not characteristically in the language of incarnationalism. Yet it goes to show that the Army has not been immune to the broader history of Christian theology in this country, and that it too has been influenced by that current of ideas which first emerged clearly in the middle of the nineteenth century, and which has come to be called the Anglican tradition of social witness.

My aim in this essay is to say something of the origins of this movement, and of its continuing relevance today, by offering a historical re-description of its origins,

attending particularly to some of its earliest and most influential advocates, including the theologians F.D. Maurice (1805-1872) and Charles Gore (1853-1932). Maurice was certainly a theologian of the incarnation in that classic mid- and late-nineteenth century sense, and the slightly later Gore was probably the best-known of all of those who followed on more or less from the inspiration of Maurice's social theology. Gore, in the eyes of many, effectively fused Maurice's Christian Socialism onto High Church Anglicanism, and created what became a highly influential school of Anglo-Catholic social radicalism. Yet it would be a mistake to pin everything on just one or two seminal figures, for my argument here is above all that this was, and is, a profoundly inventive *tradition*, which encompassed or drew on various influences, and which cannot be pigeonholed in the reactionary, ritual-obsessed way that some of its fiercest opponents have assumed. It cannot be traced back only to Maurice, for many of its liveliest concerns had quite a different source, and were central to those very Oxford Movement leaders from whom Maurice himself broke away. What emerges from my attempt to 're-read' this tradition is a picture of a positive and creative attention to the building of Christian community, in a way which avoided the mere repetition of existing pastoral strategies, and which was genuinely experimental, whilst being no less traditional for all that. The theological inspiration of this tradition unquestionably lay in the heavy accent High Church Anglicans came to place on the doctrine of the incarnation, but they pursued an integrated vision of faith in which community action, liturgy, personal devotion, education and theology cohered in a sacramental and incarnational way of viewing the world, and not least in the eucharist.

A re-reading of this tradition is necessary today, not only because of its relative neglect amongst those who read Christian theology, but because the particular movement of Christian Socialism with which Maurice's name, and those of others, is also associated itself has been almost written out of the conventional histories of the British left. Admittedly Christian Socialism is a subset of the broader tradition of Anglican social theology, but it is an especially significant subset, and one which is central to the view many Anglicans continue to hold of their influence on the evolution of British social policy. Yet outside the Anglican world, this influence is commonly disputed or ignored. Yes, we like to *say* things like the Labour movement owed more to Methodism than to Marx, but that is not generally how Labour historians have seen things. Much more prominent in the historiography of the Left has been the view put forward by one of the early propagandists of the quasi-Marxist Social Democratic Federation, a forerunner of the Labour Party, who claimed that "it is as reasonable to speak of Christian Socialism as it would be to speak of Christian Arithmetic or Christian Geometry".[2] Marx himself had written in the *Communist Manifesto* that "Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat".[3] Another early Socialist apologist, Ernest Belfort Bax, dismissed the Guild of St Matthew, a radical Anglican organization formed by Stewart Headlam (1847-1924), disciple of F.D. Maurice, as "merely [representing] a phase common to ages of transition in which the reactionary ideal and morality endeavours to steal a march on the progressive ideal and morality".[4]

It is hardly surprising that that view has never been very attractive in Anglican circles. Here instead there has been almost the opposite tendency, the creation of a

mythology – fed by the example of the great slum-priests – of Anglo-Catholic identification with the poor that could even promote Anglo-Catholicism as the Anglican equivalent of liberation theology.[5] The long history of Anglican social witness that stems from Maurice, Gore and others is often assumed to have found its practical expression in the slum priests of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, men such as Robert Dolling of Portsmouth and the East End, who supposedly said of his own social commitments that "'I speak out and fight about the drains because I believe in the Incarnation.'"[6] The mythology of the slum priest cries out for a certain debunking, and yet also a certain *re*-mythologizing. Debunking, because, however seriously one takes the social commitment of those outstanding characters, the 'slum priests' were not unique, but simply one further instance of the extraordinary reach of the British churches into the heart of the cities in the nineteenth century. There were plenty of Evangelical parallels – not only remarkably committed and able Evangelical Anglicans, but a host of Nonconformist or pan-Evangelical bodies such as the London City Mission, the Christian Mission and then its successor the Salvation Army, the Primitive Methodists, the Methodist Central Missions of the late nineteenth century, the ragged schools, and so on.[7] We have to re-read all these initiatives in concert with a re-reading of the history of religion in Britain, dispensing with much that has passed for common knowledge about the assumed (but illusory) history of secularization.[8] What emerges is not so much the picture of a few heroic individuals, as of a heroic religious *culture*. And I say that, even without taking anything away from the evident indifference and suspicion with which the work of religious professionals was popularly regarded in the Victorian and Edwardian era, and for which there is a lot of compelling evidence.[9]

And then *re*-mythologizing. What Anglo-Catholicism, and the Anglican social tradition more broadly, helped to create was nevertheless a movement with a distinct theological character, and genuine social commitment. Maurice – who was not himself classifiable as an Anglo-Catholic, though arguably he was a High Churchman - did outline a theological method that helped many Anglicans to move beyond the economic individualism which sat comfortably beside the preoccupation of Evangelicals and early High Churchmen alike with personal redemption and sin.[10] What he and others signalled was captured a little too neatly by the historian Boyd Hilton, in his claim that around the middle of the nineteenth century British theology moved out of an 'age of atonement' and into an 'age of incarnation'.[11] Maurice was not alone amongst Anglican theologians in his scepticism of political economy, the 'dismal science' of Carlyle's famous diatribe.[12] Again contrary to the well-worn prejudices of some, it is clear (as I shall show) that even the early Tractarians themselves were profoundly concerned about the well-being of society as a whole, and committed to a vision of the Church as a great engine of social reform.

What all this suggests is that the Anglican tradition of social criticism still has a lot going for it, for it was not the product of isolated, creative minds, but rather the logical development of a movement which sought to look at contemporary society through a vision of what the Church might be. It also suggests – to me – that this remains a powerful and radical vision still, contrary to the temptation of some Labour historians practically to write it out of the narrative. If this appears to be giving what seem to be conclusions before I have hardly begun the analysis, it is because I see these points rather as ways into the discussion. In the rest of this essay, my aim is to contextualize this social theology by looking at its situation in ecclesiology, because

that is where its rationale is to be found. I will do that first by looking briefly at three main sources of this tradition, though concentrating particularly on the ecclesiological vision of F.D. Maurice, and second by re-interpreting the history of Christian Socialism in that light.[13] Underlying my argument are three propositions, exposition of which in itself is largely beyond the scope of this essay: first, that though the Anglican tradition of social theology has a very distinct 'English' face, still it also has roots and context in the whole history of European Christianity, and in particular with the problems of European Christianity in the nineteenth century; second, that Christian Socialism in the hands of Maurice, Gore and others in fact was nothing other than applied ecclesiology, and not some sort of religious 'take' on Socialism; and third, that one cannot in this sense be too preoccupied with ecclesiology, for ecclesiology and Christian doctrine are completely inseparable. But the main point of my re-reading is to refocus attention on the implications of this tradition for the local community, and to show it as an innovative and creative tradition.

Anglican social theology: an ecclesiology of community

If we search back through history for the many and varied roots of this Anglican tradition of social theology, the results will take us to some surprising places. The conventional narrative put forward by historians of nineteenth-century Britain has tended to cast the Oxford Movement in particular, and Anglo-Catholicism in general, as essentially nostalgic and reactionary, remote from political and social concerns, tied up in the coils of intra-university arguments, and preoccupied with arcane matters of church doctrine and liturgy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Leaving to one side the highly complex question of High Church identity in the

early nineteenth century – for modern scholarship, led by Peter Nockles, has recovered for us a picture a wide range of High Church opinion, of which the Oxford Movement was but one aspect – the Tractarian revival was concerned above all to reinvigorate Anglican parish life.[14] That did not just mean liturgical renewal, and the inculcation of religious principles, however: it also meant the entire recasting of social relations in the community, based on the assumption that Christian faith is in essence a social programme, for which the theological rationale was the doctrine of the incarnation. The Oxford historian Simon Skinner, in a monograph of remarkable astuteness, has demonstrated how Tractarian social teaching was both conservative in its assumptions about the interdependence of social classes and the interrelations of Church and State, and also progressive in its aspirations for the transformation of local communities. As he asserts, for the Oxford leaders and their followers, whilst for political reasons and effects defence of the Church "was a means of resisting the encroachment of secular agencies", socially the Church "presented the spectacle of christian fellowship to which secular society might look".[15] And it was the parish above all which embodied these aspirations. Keble's cultivation of his parish of Hursley, where he ministered for over forty years, is the one example frequently cited: not only did he build school and churches, as one might have expected, but he also supported allotments, a parish savings bank, and migration for desperate cases.[16] But the significance of Hursley is not causal, but illustrative; as Skinner comments, it is not that the example of Hursley was carried "downwind to thousands of vicarages nationwide", but that the movement's social and pastoral ideals were "deliberately disseminated" through published media.[17]

That is why 'Plain' or 'Parochial' sermons form such a large part of the corpus of Tractarian publications – Newman's own *Parochial and Plain Sermons* were but the most famous example of many. One of the most influential manuals on preaching was written by the Tractarian William Gresley (1801-1876), who argued that a preacher had to adapt his language and style to "the peculiarities of those whom he addresses".[18] The Tractarian system of divinity, for all its importance as a reassertion of Church principles, needed "reasoning and analogy" to work out its implications in parishes.[19] Gresley thought the parish system was as much of divine institution as was episcopacy, and therefore he, like most of the Tractarians, devoted much attention to promoting the reform and renewal of the spiritual life of parishes.[20] It is true – and Skinner acknowledges this – that the social implications of Tractarian teaching were in a sense to emerge from its preoccupation with personal salvation and devotion, rather than being flagged 'up front' as part of a programme of social renewal. This was to give Tractarian preaching a severe and ascetic if nevertheless 'plain' and pastoral edge. So Gresley emphasized "self-examination, self-discipline, regard to conscience, frequent prayer, devout communion, holy observance, and habitual watchfulness": all these things were necessary to cultivate "that heavenly principle of faith which is the essence of the life of God in the heart of man".[21] For Pusey, prayer, alms and fasting were a "holy band, for which our Blessed Lord gives rules together, and which draw up the soul to Him".[22] Yet Pusey fulminated against the evils of industrialism, and held up the Church as a model of human community and social justice.[23] The Tractarians and their followers were hardly free from the general social assumptions and prejudices which shaped their class and age, and yet within their religious ideals they were nevertheless surprisingly radical and egalitarian, espousing the abolition of obvious social distinctions within the

worshipping community, including those sustained by the almost universal practice of pew rents, and emphasizing modesty in dress and the superiority of ecclesiastical discipline to social convention.

Nevertheless the most startling and ultimately influential statement of Anglican social radicalism was to emerge from the group who surrounded F.D. Maurice in mid-century, and who first (in England, anyway) adopted the sobriquet 'Christian Socialist', and it is therefore to Maurice that we must look for a truly *social* approach. As we shall see, Maurice's social radicalism cannot be separated at all, however, from his ecclesiological vision. Maurice was born to Unitarian parents in Lowestoft in 1805, studied at Cambridge and later Oxford, and came into the respective social circles of Julius Hare, later archdeacon and a disciple of Coleridge, and William Gladstone. In a way, those two circles symbolized the characteristic mixture of Coleridgeanism and High Churchmanship to be encountered in his mature theology. He was received into the Church of England through adult baptism in March 1831, and most of his active ministry was spent in London, in successive positions as Chaplain of Guy's Hospital and then Lincoln's Inn, and as a Professor of Theology at the new King's College until 1853, when he lost his chair over his controversial views on eschatology. Late in life, not long before his death in 1872, he was elected to the Knightbridge chair of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge.[24]

It is common for historians of Victorian thought to trace Maurice's interest in Chartism, political radicalism and social activism to his upbringing as son of a Unitarian minister.[25] Clearly that must have played a part, because it was an unusual background for a prominent mid-Victorian Anglican clergyman. But it is not perhaps

the best place to begin an assessment of his social thought. Instead, one has to start from his most significant work on ecclesiology, *The Kingdom of Christ*, usually read in the second edition published in 1842. The term 'kingdom theology' undoubtedly stems from the title of that book, for Maurice argued that the kingdom of Christ was an existing reality, and not merely a future goal, and as such already exercised its claims of justice and peace over the nations of the earth. But scholars rarely take seriously the sub-title, which gives an important clue to the nature of the book – *Hints to a Quaker respecting the Principles, Constitution and Ordinances of the Catholic Church*. These are 'hints' – not a systematic picture. 'Hints' suggests something which definitely exists, but which needs to be sought out in diverse and fragmented forms. And then those words 'Principles', 'Constitution', and 'Ordinances' – words which sound as if they come rather from political science than from Christian doctrine. But they are to be taken in full seriousness, implying that the Catholic Church has its own distinct political and constitutional order, an order implanted in the world by God, and eternal and unchanging. There are Neoplatonic overtones to Maurice's language: the 'spiritual constitution', as he describes it, is rather like a form or idea inhering in material reality, constituting it, shaping it, yet also correcting it, and rebuking it; it is in other words both a moral and a metaphysical reality.[26] His study of ecclesiology aimed to draw out the elements of this 'spiritual constitution', by looking at its imprints in the world.

For Maurice the Catholicity of the Church was to be discerned in and through the Church's brokenness, and in all its various, fragmented manifestations: the Church was a central harmonious principle for the world, and in a sense the deeper meaning

of the world. In another work Maurice even went so far as to say that the world "contains the elements of which the Church is composed":

> In the Church these elements are penetrated by a uniting, reconciling power. The Church is, therefore, human society in its normal state; the World, that same society irregular and abnormal. The world is the Church without God; the Church is the world restored to its relation with God, taken back by Him into the state for which He created it.[27]

This is perhaps not so very far from Origen's understanding of the Church as the "divine world-state" which, under the universal rule of the Logos, would "constitute the true cosmos in the world".[28]

This conception of the Church obviously raises some difficulties, not least because it could imply that all human societies and associations are incomplete unless absorbed into the Church. Maurice did not push his argument *that* far explicitly. Rather, in *The Kingdom of Christ*, he concentrated much of his argument instead on the external features – the 'ordinances' - by which the 'spiritual constitution' could be identified. These have a familiar ring – baptism, eucharist, the Catholic creeds, the Scriptures, episcopacy, and a fixed or regular liturgical life. Take away that last, and essentially there are here the main points of what later came to be formulated as the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral.[29] The sacraments and church order were definitely objective and effectual for Maurice, and he had no hesitation in describing them as divine. This is the side of Maurice that was so attractive to his later Anglo-Catholic followers, including most famously Michael Ramsey, who said of Maurice that "his emphasis upon Church order springs directly from his sense of the Gospel of God".[30]

The language of constitutionalism, of order and ordinances, might reek of a certain kind of nineteenth-century political conservatism, and suggest a rather static, rigid vision underlying Maurice's apparently ecumenical ecclesiology, and I think that charge has some merit.[31] But it is worth bearing in mind that Maurice essentially sought to articulate corresponding outward and inward definitions of the Church. He identified the outward signs of Catholicity in order to answer what was in effect a reflexive question, namely, Given that the one of Church of Christ exists amongst the divided bodies of Christians in the world, how and where could one find it? Even when Christians were bitterly divided over doctrine and order, Maurice suggested, elements (the 'hints' again) of the one Church could be traced in their own particular traditions. But the inward definition was equally important for him, for it rested on what could broadly be called a theology of participation in God, drawn perhaps as Donald Allchin has suggested from Maurice's rather eclectic reading of the Greek Fathers.[32] The Church was a fellowship of communion, in which knowledge of God, that is, participation in God's very being of love, was offered to those who trusted in him, for if God gave us grace "not to love our lives to the death; if he makes us willing to sacrifice ourselves for His glory and the good of men, the communion [of believers with God] may become very real even here".[33]

It would be possible to leave the analysis of Maurice's ecclesiology at this point, because it is clear from that last quote how his vision of the Church as the centre of the world and as a communion whose very being is a sharing in the communion of God drives him towards what would today be called an inclusive vision of humanity. That could be sufficient as a basis for a social theology. It was certainly an unusual emphasis in the nineteenth century. But there are three further

points to make. The first takes us back to the language of constitutionalism. Maurice's idea of the Church as a constitution for humanity functioned as just one aspect of a threefold idea of human association, albeit the highest one, for alongside the Church, Maurice also conceived of the nation and the family as intrinsic aspects of God's providential and creative care.[34] I cannot deal with the family here, but the concept of nation effectively for Maurice expressed the notion of the *local* church: the one Catholic Church was encountered in and through national churches. Nationality was divinely intended.[35] There was a debt here to Coleridge's *Constitution of the Church and State* (1830), with its idea of the "opposition and necessary harmony of Law and Religion".[36] For Maurice, the national church's responsibility was therefore to and for the whole of society, and if we apply his conception of the Church as a communion for all, with no distinction of rank, then it is not difficult to see how and why his defence of establishment rested on a view of the Church which was capable of radical political engagement. It implied, after all, a substantial criticism of possessive individualism and the doctrine of private interests serving public ends, for, in concert with this national corporatism, Maurice could assert that "Many writers begin with considering mankind a multitude of units…I cannot adopt that method. At my birth, I am already in a Society".[37]

Moreover – the second point – Maurice rooted his idea of the Church's responsibility for all in his understanding of the incarnation, which he never discussed in any systematic way but which is nevertheless a recurrent theme of his work. Again, here there was a contrast with what he took to be the dominant Evangelical conception of the life of faith as essentially a matter of individual concern. For Maurice, the affirmation of material reality in and through the incarnation

contradicted the common tendency to see the life of faith as a passage through a vale of tears in hope of a better, future life after death. Rather he affirmed a view of the Church "as a fellowship constituted by God Himself, in a divine and human Person, by Whom it is upheld, by Whom it is preserved from the dismemberment with which the selfish tendencies of our nature are always threatening it".[38] This fellowship was actual, and present. The doctrine of the incarnation accordingly was the engine not only of a particular understanding of the Church itself, but of the Church's vision of humanity as a fellowship of mutual love and responsibility. "[If] Christ be really the head of every man", Maurice asserted, "and if He really [has] taken human flesh, there is ground for a universal fellowship among men…Now the denial of a universal head is practically the denial of all communion in society".[39] He could call the incarnation the "kernel mystery of the universe".[40] As the centre of history, the incarnation was both the principle through which history was to be interpreted, and the guarantee of God's gift to all humanity, regardless of class, race or gender: it showed the people of the highways that they were partakers of "the most unspeakable privileges".[41]

But where could one look to see this vision of communion, this incarnational praxis, embedded? This brings me to my third point, and the final one I want to make in my all-too-brief survey of Maurice's ecclesiology. Of course the implication of all that I have said before is that Maurice thought that the polity and practice of the Church should reflect its divine constitution. But the Church of England of Maurice's day did not have any central organization to speak of – no Board for Mission and Unity, no Doctrine Commission, hardly any central bureaucracy, not even (for most of his life) a representative system of sorts, and certainly of course no Archbishops'

Council. It is not clear where or how some sort of national policy could have been devised to match Maurice's social vision – even assuming he could have persuaded the hierarchy of its merits. Instead, his eyes were almost always on the severely local, on the parish, which for Maurice in effect became the most important locus of the Church's national, social vocation. The true Universal Church was implied "in the existence" of each particular church.[42] And so he took his own local, particular responsibilities with the utmost seriousness, and resisted attempts by various of his followers to persuade him to abandon or bypass his local commitments in order to head national organizations. The parish was the centre of his radical praxis. As he wrote tellingly to one of his most prominent supporters:

> [T]he Devil will not the least object to my saying the Church has a bearing upon all common life, if I take no pains that my particular Church should bear upon it at all…Lincoln's Inn is a very powerful body of cultivated men in the midst of as bad a neighbourhood for health and probably education as most in London. If a small body of us could unite to do something for that place our bond would be surely a quasi-sacramental one – a much better one than that of any club or league.[43]

If we can see in Maurice's ecclesiology how it was possible to draw together an incarnational doctrine with a social theology, that process was certainly carried further in the work of subsequent generations of Anglo-Catholic thinkers. The leading figure here must surely be Charles Gore. Gore, along with Henry Scott Holland and others, was one of the founders of the Christian Social Union, which promoted the study of social issues from a Christian perspective, and which came to represent a rather loose and largely non-political (or non-partisan) Christian Socialism

amongst senior clergy of the Church of England at the end of the nineteenth century. Gore's theological importance in this respect has many strands. Influenced at Balliol College, Oxford by the school of Philosophical Idealism associated with Thomas Green (1836-1882), he viewed the doctrine of the incarnation as the central principle by which the evolution of history could be understood Christianly, as was indicated by his contributions to the notorious essay collection *Lux Mundi* (1889), sub-titled *A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*. Perhaps more than anyone else, he coupled a theological and liturgical approach that was explicitly Anglo-Catholic with a commitment to a radical social theology he was prepared to call 'socialist'. He was doctrinally orthodox, or even conservative, and yet alert to the implications of modern Biblical and historical criticism for traditional theology. He was not, as James Carpenter pointed out, a systematic theologian, but rather a church theologian and Christian apologist, who sought to interpret the world he experienced in Christian terms, and to challenge his society to fulfil the Christian social vision.[44]

Gore certainly read and appreciated Maurice, though he also imbibed much from Brooke Foss Westcott's parallel but somewhat separate commitment to a Christian social thought.[45] Like Maurice, he was sceptical of the individualistic connotations of much that passed for popular theology. Unlike Maurice, however, he was prepared to countenance the organization of Christian opinion at a national level, and to use his influence, both as a theologian and then as bishop successively of Worcester, Birmingham and Oxford, to argue for a socially-engaged Anglicanism. Much could be written about the nature and implications of his social theology. But it is worth noting in particular two aspects of his life and work, both of which bear on the theme of community. One was his commitment to eucharistic worship as the

Church's expression of its social vision. This is made very clear right at the beginning of his discussion of eucharistic doctrine, *The Body of Christ* (1901), for there he defends his choice of title not only the grounds that it refers to the sacrament itself, but that it also refers to "the nature of the holy society" of which the sacrament is the "spiritual nourishment".[46] The full implications of this emphasis, at least in practical worship, were to await development in the twentieth century, in the liturgical movement associated in particular with the parish communion and the name of Gabriel Hebert. But we can see in essence the strong connection liturgical renewal was to make between the celebration of the eucharist and the constitution of community already present in Gore's theology. Gore found in Patristic thought a social resonance lost altogether, he argued, from more modern conceptions: a "miserable individualism in our thoughts of holy communion has taken the place", he claimed, "of the rich and moving thought which in ancient days was so prominent"; a truly sacrificial manner of living, encapsulated in a "unity of spirit and life" in our worship, should show itself in "real brotherliness…[and] in those habitual and considerate good works of love by which the body of Christ on earth is to be bound together".[47] Here we have more than an echo of the Oxford Movement's conviction that liturgy and life go together, and of Maurice's sense that the implications of Christian worship and teaching are for the whole of society, and that Christians need to think outwards from the way they worship to the way they relate to others around them. We also have more than an echo, incidentally, of Continental Catholicism's twentieth-century *ressourcement*.

But Gore did not just teach about community – he also created it, or founded it. He was not a parish priest, and one looks mostly in vain in his work for the very

high emphasis on the parish that we saw in William Gresley. But he did play the leading part in founding the Community of the Resurrection, and like most of the Community's founders, as Alan Wilkinson tells us, he thought of it as a Christian Socialist community.[48] Practicalities surely fell far short of ideals in the implementation of this vision. Though CR has proved immensely influential in different ways throughout the twentieth century, and is associated particularly with the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa as well as with the ideals of the Christian Social Union, for much of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century it was essentially a group of public school and Oxbridge-educated clergy who shared many of the social prejudices of their class. Still, its attempt to re-imagine a religious order in a way which constructively responded to the social and industrial conditions of the modern world remains an engaging and relevant example, not least because in this it echoed the spirit of other newly-founded Anglican communities, such as the Community of St John the Baptist, or 'Sisters of Mercy' founded at Clewer in 1852, and the Society of the Sacred Mission, founded by Herbert Kelly in 1893.

What is offered above is no more than a selective sketch of aspects of the roots of modern Anglican social theology, taken from the particular perspective of High Churchmanship and Anglo-Catholicism. This is not meant to imply that other traditions within Anglicanism, and within British Christianity more widely, have had no part to play in Christian responses to the social challenges of the modern age. But it is meant, in a sense polemically, to assert the constructive and adaptive relevance of a tradition which is at risk of allowing itself be seen as static, self-preoccupied and defensive. It is also intended as a reminder that innovation and inventiveness is not a feature of the contemporary church alone, but an abiding aspect of the history of the

Church of England in the last two centuries or more. Fuelled by their strong emphasis on the doctrine of the incarnation, Anglo-Catholics proved themselves ready to improvise new solutions to new problems, even as they asserted the authority of the ancient church. The primary location for innovation, in practice and also in theory, was almost always the parish, for that is where the ministry of the Church was located, and where the people of God could meet to offer prayer and praise. Thus the revival and renewal of eucharistic worship was definitely part of a 'social programme' for Anglo-Catholics. But they were also instrumental in developing parish missions, active in encouraging social and welfare organizations for the local community, prepared if necessary to engage socially and politically to promote the well-being of the local community, and willing in themselves (hence the mythology of the 'slum priests') to demonstrate that 'incarnational living' Stuart Jeffries was to find in quite a different church context decades later.

The Church and Christian 'Socialism'

Having looked selectively at the roots of the Anglo-Catholic tradition of social theology, I now continue my re-reading of this tradition by looking a little more closely at the specific phenomenon of Christian Socialism. This is a movement particularly associated with Maurice's name, and which was certainly the exemplar of his social theology, but it outgrew his rather limited conception of social and political action in the decades following his death. According to the conventional narrative it began when Maurice, together with Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) and a lawyer, John Ludlow (1821-1911), were jogged into action by the failure of the Chartist movement in 1848, which in their view exposed the inability of the Church of England to

understand or sympathize with the plight of working people.[49] For four years, so the conventional account runs, the three of them, together with a ragtag band of young supporters, published journals and pamphlets aimed at working people, campaigned on various welfare and employment issues, and encouraged the formation of workers' co-operatives. The events cannot be gainsaid, but as I have already implied, the context in which we have to read these initiatives from Maurice's perspective does need re-examination.

Maurice was certainly well aware of the general level of public concern over the conditions of working people in Britain in the 1830s and 1840s, and particularly of the literature of the 'Hungry Forties'. But the initiatives in which he was involved from 1848 on were almost all local and small-scale, and related one way or another to his ministry. He started Bible classes at which working men studied alongside professionals, a night school for working men, a ragged school for poor children, and a network of contacts which included various Chartist leaders.[50] Much of this effort was not all that different from the social activism of many other parish clergy. But in his writing, and in particular his various attempts at producing literature for working people, such as the short-lived journal *Politics for the People*, the connection Maurice sought to make between the alleviation of poverty and the responsibility of the national church for the whole of society was very clear. As he said in the journal's opening number, "POLITICS FOR THE PEOPLE cannot be separated from Religion. They must start from Atheism, or from the acknowledgment that a Living and Righteous God is ruling in human society not less than in the natural world".[51] And again, much of this literature was aimed equally at the Church itself, for as he said, "[if] we do not sympathize with [working men's] miseries we are not fit to discuss the

remedies which they propose themselves, or which others have proposed for them".[52] Christian Socialism – a term which Maurice finally adopted in 1850 – was not striking off in a new direction, but simply exploring more intensely and closely the implications of his ecclesiology.

That much is clear too from the more impressive efforts Maurice, Ludlow and others made in the direction of co-operation. Here again what they achieved was relatively short-lived, and mostly confined to London. Moreover it did not make much contact with the separate, parallel movement which had begun somewhat earlier in northern England – famously in Rochdale – and which was to be more directly the genesis of the modern cooperative movement.[53] The key to the success of the Rochdale and related schemes was mutuality and common ownership by consumers; the schemes the London Christian Socialists promoted were producers' cooperatives, in many ways a much more challenging and difficult task to carry off when faced with direct competition from other, private producers. Tailors', shoemakers', builders', printers', bakers' and needlewomen's associations were created within a couple of years from 1850 under the auspices of a Central Board of management chaired by Maurice, but most of these organizations did not last more than a few years.[54] What mattered to Maurice was that the principle of association, or co-operation, expressed perfectly his understanding of the mutuality of the communion of the Church. As he said, co-operation was a way of carrying out "what seems to us the only law of fellowship among Christian men".[55] Indeed, he even extended the principle of co-operation to the relation of the sexes.[56]

Maurice may have devised a characteristic and distinctive justification for the workers' associations, but it is also important to recognize that they echoed similar steps taken on the continent in the 1840s, and particularly in France. John Ludlow had spent many years in France and was familiar with French radical politics, visiting Paris specifically several times between 1848 and 1850 to see the French workers' associations at first hand. Instrumental in the French movement was Philippe Joseph Benjamin Buchez (1796-1865), a former disciple of Saint-Simon who had converted to Catholicism in 1829 but who never became a practising Catholic, hoping instead to 'Christianize' French republicanism.[57] He believed that the ideals of the French Revolution were a development of the fundamental truths of Christianity, and especially of its principle of altruism. Buchez's movement undoubtedly provided some of the inspiration for Ludlow, and indirectly for Maurice. A long article on 'Practical socialism' in his 'house journal' *L'Atelier* distinguished true, practical socialism from false, dangerous socialism, which it is clear the writer identified with theoretical socialism.[58] The expression of this practical socialism would be the principle of association, the only means by which workers could be truly free. Independent associations, relating to each other and to the State, would become the necessary social correlative to the political power achieved by enfranchising the working class. Incidentally, these 'associations' were not so dissimilar from the mediating institutions a later Anglican writer, J.N. Figgis (1866-1919) was to propose as essential for the well-being of the modern democratic state.[59] The writer in *L'Atelier* conceded that this would require a higher standard of virtue from workers than was possible in a state of wage-labour, but he didn't seem to see this as an obstacle. Association was a high and demanding moral ideal.

Buchez himself showed scant interest in Britain, unlike the rest of the French Catholic press. But he shared with the continental press the conviction that the conditions under which the poor lived in Britain were exceptionally degrading.[60] *L'Atelier*'s comment on the ill-fated Chartist meeting on Kennington Common in April 1848, at which the People's Charter and petition was paraded before being submitted to Parliament, was that, having hoped to see the dawn of a new republic, in fact the day found the people "a mob ['une masse'] made stupid and effete ['lâche'] by the physical and moral misery in which the English aristocracy has enchained it".[61] We can easily match this contempt for the situation of the British working class – very widespread in continental Europe in the mid-nineteenth century - with the conviction of southern plantation owners in America that slavery, however objectionable in itself, was preferable to the conditions of the factories and the degradation of wage labour – an argument put forward also by no less a person than Maurice's friend Thomas Carlyle.[62]

Ludlow's awareness of these continental perspectives put him in a different place from Maurice when it came to questions of strategy. The two nearly fell out over Maurice's refusal to be drawn into supporting Ludlow's attempt to create a national workers' organization. By the mid-1850s, Maurice's interest in the workers' associations had apparently waned, and again most scholars have assumed that all this simply demonstrates his impractical nature, and his failure to grasp the real nature of socialism.[63] The same comments have been made against the whole of the history of the Christian Socialist movement, however, and even against the broader and more amorphous phenomenon of Anglican social theology in general.[64] For all its organization and publication, the Christian Social Union seemed to be not much more

than a talking shop, after all. Christian Socialist groups were notoriously small and fissiparous in the early twentieth century, and even the resurgence of the movement towards the end of the century, and its apparent apogee under Blair, has not dented much the common general impression that Christian Socialism remains a curiously wan and underdeveloped animal.

But it is too easy to sneer. In the nineteenth century, people were still groping their way cautiously towards the elaboration of coherent programmes and political and social reform, and from a twenty-first century perspective, it is not at all clear that the collectivist approaches adopted by State welfarism in place of voluntary action were the inevitable and successful solutions they were assumed to be in 1945. It is no accident that, across Europe, and in America, the challenges of industrialization and the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment, and the political inheritance of the more radical and anti-religious aspects of the French Revolutionary tradition were putting enormous strains on the Christian churches. One possible way forward was the Ultramontane way, the institutionalization of resistance to change through a highly centralized ecclesial system that was itself, paradoxically, an echo of the authoritarian, bureaucratized methods of the modern State. Another way was what eventually came to be called 'fundamentalism' (though not until the early twentieth century). The Christian Socialists were trying precisely not to commit themselves to any strategy that would leave the Church stranded, wrapped up in its own affairs. They sought the transformation of the Church, not through a centralized campaign, but by its reinvigoration at local level.

Conclusion

It is a mistake to judge the tradition of social theology that Maurice and others came to represent from the standard of a conception of socialism as a material philosophy that one encounters again and again in the literature of the modern labour movement. Nor is it persuasive, I think, to bracket it with 'ethical socialism', a term which is almost always used in a pejorative way, as if a falling away from the harder-edged, 'gold' standard of Marxist economics. So I reiterate that the only place in which one can effectively read Anglican social theology is in the context of ecclesiology. It is perhaps best thought of as 'applied ecclesiology'. In the case of Anglo-Catholicism, it was an attempt to work out the implications of convictions about the incarnation and about the divine constitution of the Church as a union or communion of human beings as a prophetic corrective to a Church which had bought too easily into moral and economic individualism. Maurice constantly reminded his readers, and his hearers, that Christian faith was for the world, as God had made the world: its message, its value, was universal, and could not be wrapped up in a 'private sphere'. His later followers, such as Stewart Headlam, Thomas Hancock, and Conrad Noel, drew out this conclusion even more forcefully. Headlam, for example, drew from Maurice the lesson that the incarnation established the brotherhood of men, and that "punishment, ruin, loss, damnation, Hell, inevitably and always in the long run await the nation which ignores the great principle of brotherhood".[65] As Noel was to put it, "politics, in the wider sense of social justice, are part and parcel of the gospel of Christ and to ignore them is to be false to His teaching…[W]orship divorced from social righteousness is an abomination to God".[66]

It was in fact these later figures, including not only disciples of Maurice, but also more independent voices such as Gore and Westcott, who crystallized and radicalized earlier arguments, in the process fusing them into something more like an explicitly Anglo-Catholic view. Headlam in particular took what were admittedly existing arguments in Maurice's work, but which he did not especially emphasize, and in effect codified them. He drew out Maurice's teaching on communion, the kingdom, and the eucharist, and made of it a eucharistic social theology, for as he said in *The Meaning of the Mass* (1901), for example, the social responsibility of all Christians was one which "the weekly administration of the great Emancipator's Supper intensifies, while it gives us, thank God, the strength to comply with it: the responsibility for each one of us…to think out, and try and find out, what are the evils which are preventing our England from being the veritable Kingdom of Heaven upon earth".[67] So Maurice's social theology in effect stimulated two strands that ran through the Church of England in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries – one, the Catholic, Christian Socialism of the Guild of St Matthew, the Church Socialist League, and other bodies, and the other, the less distinctly 'Anglo-Catholic' social theology of the Christian Social Union, the Christian Socialist Movement of today, of William Temple and R.H. Tawney, and others.[68] Whatever their differences in the end, both shared common roots in Maurice's ecclesiology, as well as in the theological ideals of the Oxford Movement. It is precisely because Maurice's idea of Christian Socialism was not merely a watered-down version of a secular socialist ideal, nor a mere baptism of it, but a view springing out of, and fully consistent with, his ecclesiology, that it remains still relevant today.

But it is also because the Anglo-Catholic tradition of social criticism and social thought always was, ineluctably, a tradition grounded in particular practices of worship and prayer, which sought to unite liturgy and society in a vision of community practice responsive to the social challenges of modern Britain. It wasn't as daft as suggesting that the solution to poverty was incense. Rather, it tried to express a correspondence of belief and practice, such that the behaviour of the Christian community towards the most vulnerable in the community would reflect exactly the spirit in which God himself is worshipped. This was put memorably by Frank Weston, Bishop of Zanzibar, to the Anglo-Catholic Congress of 1923: "You cannot claim to worship Jesus in the Tabernacle if you do not pity Jesus in the slum".[69] It was a tradition of experimentation, out of traditional concerns. But it was also a tradition of community action, in which the eucharist could serve as a powerful metaphor for building up the fellowship of the whole Christian community, as well as a means by which it could be sustained.

---

1 *The Guardian*, 17 December 2008, 'With God's Army'.

2 James Leathem, quoted in G. Johnson, 'British Social Democracy and Religion, 1881-1911', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51 (2000), p. 108. Johnson's article presents a much more mixed and nuanced picture than this quotation itself suggests.

3 Karl Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848*, ed. D. Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 89. Marx had France in mind, and not Britain, since the British Christian Socialist movement had not got off the ground when he wrote this.

4 Quoted in Johnson, 'British Social Democracy and Religion', p. 108.

5 This is not quite the same point as that made by John Vincent about the possibility of a modern British liberation theology, for which see C. Rowland's introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 14-5, though Vincent does draw on some historical precedents.

[6] C.E. Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling* (3rd edn., London: Arnold, 1903,), p. 245. Actually, Osborne does not put this quote directly in the mouth of Dolling, though other sources – e.g. a pamphlet published by the Catholic Literature Association in 1933 and available online at http://anglicanhistory.org/bios/rwrdolling.html (accessed 5 January 2009) - seem to have assumed he did.

[7] See e.g. K. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action* (London: Bles, 1962); K.S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1963); J. Wolffe (ed.), *Evangelical faith and public zeal: evangelicals and society in Britain, 1780-1980* (London: SPCK, 1995) ; F.K. Prochaska, *Chrstianity and social service in modern Britain: the disinherited spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[8] C.f. D.H. McLeod, *Secularisation in western Europe, 1848-1914* (Masingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), and also the more extreme statement of C.G. Brown, *The death of Christian Britain: understanding secularisation, 1800-2000* (Cambridge: Routledge, 2000). For a critical review of the latter, see J. Morris, 'The strange death of Christian Britain: another look at the secularization debate', *Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), pp. 963-76.

[9] One of the best discussions of this is S.C. Williams, *Religious belief and popular culture in Southwark, c.1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[10] On this, see especially A.M.C. Waterman, *Revolution, economics and religion: Christian political economy, 1798-1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[11] B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[12] T. Carlyle, 'Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question', in I. Campbell (ed.), Thomas Carlyle: Selected Essays (New edn., London: Dent, 1915), p. 308.

[13] In what follows, I am drawing substantially on J. Morris, *F.D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[14] P.B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[15] S. Skinner, *Tractarians and the Condition of England: The social and political thought of the Oxford Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 139.

[16] Skinner, *Tractarians and the Condition of England*, p. 146. Cf. Keble's famous remark, "If the Church of England were to fail, it should be found in my parish": W.O. Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement: Tractarian Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 62.

[17] Skinner, *Tractarians and the Condition of England*, p. 142.

[18] W. Gresley, *Ecclesiastes Anglicanus: being a Treatise on the Art of Preaching, as a adapted to a Church of England Congregation* (London: Rivington, 1835), p. v.

[19] W. Gresley, *The Necessity of Zeal and Moderation: the Present Circumstances of the Church, enforced and illustrated in five sermons preached before the University of Oxford* (London: Rivingtons, 1839), pp. vi-vii.

[20] Gresley, *Zeal and Moderation*, p. 72.

[21] W. Gresley, *Practical Sermons* (London: Joseph Masters, 1848), p. 56.

[22] E.B. Pusey, *Sermons during the Season from Advent to Whitsuntide* (Oxford: Parker, 1848), p. 189.

[23] Cf. R.W. Franklin, *Nineteenth-century churches: the history of a new Catholicism in Württemberg, England, and France* (New York & London: Garland, 1997), pp. 232-3.

[24] The standard life is F. Maurice, *The Life and Letters of F.D. Maurice* (London: Macmillan, 1884), which has never been surpassed for detail, though F. McClain, *Maurice: Man and Moralist* (London: SPCK, 1972) adds some useful information and insight.

[25] Cf. O.J. Brose, *Frederick Denison Maurice: Rebellious Conformist* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1971).

[26] For the significance of this identification, see the very title of what some (for example J.M. Ludlow) regarded as Maurice's finest work, *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy* (New edn., 2 vols., London: Macmillan, 1873).

[27] F.D. Maurice, *Theological Essays* (4th edn., London: Macmillan, 1881), p. 343.

[28] At least, as described in W. Pauck, 'The Idea of the Church in Christian History', *Church History*, 21 (1952), p. 197.

[29] Maurice's conception was almost certainly influential on William R. Huntington, whose formulation in *The Church Idea* (1870) in turned influenced the General Convention of the Episcopal Church at Chicago in 1886: M. Woodhouse-Hawkins, 'Maurice, Huntington, and the Quadrilateral', in J. Robert Wright (ed.), *Quadrilateral at One Hundred* (Oxford, 1988). Nevertheless Maurice's

discussion itself could be said to stand in a long tradition of Anglican views, stemming back at least as far as Richard Field's *Of the Church* (1606), for which see Morris, *F.D. Maurice*, pp. 79-80.

[30] A.M. Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (London: Longmans Green, 1936), p. 214.

[31] That seems to me part of the charge underlying John Milbank's passing comment in *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) that Maurice was working within "the 'English positivist' tradition of a 'discoverable divine government'": ibid., p. 34.

[32] See A.M. Allchin, 'F.D. Maurice as Theologian', *Theology*, 76 (1973).

[33] F.D. Maurice, *The Doctrine of Sacrifice Deduced from the Scriptures* (2nd edn., London: Macmillan, 1879), p. 241.

[34] F.D. Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ, or Hints to a Quaker Respecting the Principles, Constitution and Ordinances of the Catholic Church*, vol. I, (4th edn., London: Macmillan, 1891), pp. 260-71.

[35] It is this that led Rowan Williams to suggest that the "whole tenor of Maurice's work is anti-pluralist and even theocratic", though this does not altogether reflect the running theme of liberty and of the partial or incomplete nature of all actual historical associations in Maurice's writings: R.D. Williams, 'Liberation Theology and the Anglican Tradition', in D. Nicholls & R.D. Williams, *Politics and Theological Identity. Two Anglican Essays* (London: Jubilee, 1984), p. 18.

[36] Maurice, *Kingdom of Christ*, I, p. xxi.

[37] F.D. Maurice, *Social Morality* (London: Macmillan, 1869), p. 24.

[38] F.D. Maurice, *Christian Socialism* (1893), a pamphlet quoted in Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes*, and in turn in C. Walsh, 'The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist Conscience in the Victorian Church of England', *The Journal of British Studies*, 34 (1995), p. 356; the title was not an original one of Maurice's, and I have not yet been able to verify this quotation from work published in Maurice's lifetime.

[39] Maurice, *Life*, II, p. 258.

[40] F.D. Maurice, *What is Revelation?* (London: Macmillan, 1859), p. 102.

[41] F.D. Maurice, *Lincoln's Inn Sermons*, 1st series, I (London: Macmillan, 1860), p. 199.

[42] Ibid., p. 285.

[43] Maurice, *Life*, II, pp. 26-7.

[44] J. Carpenter, *Gore; a Study in Liberal catholic Thought* (London: Faith Press, 1960), p. 14.

[45] Carpenter, *Gore*, pp. 244-5.

[46] C. Gore, *The Body of Christ. An Inquiry into the Institution and Doctrine of Holy Communion* (London: John Murray, 1901), p. 1.

[47] Gore, *The Body of Christ*, pp. 286-7.

[48] A. Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (London: SCM, 1998), p. 53.

[49] Cf. C.E. Raven, *Christian Socialism 1848-54* (new edn., London: Cass, 1968), and T. Christensen, *The Origins and History of Christian Socialism 1848-1854* (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget, 1962).

[50] Morris, *F.D. Maurice*, pp. 141-3.

[51] *Politics for the People*, no. 1, 6 May 1848.

[52] Ibid., loc cit.

[53] See G.D. H. Cole, *A Century of Cooperation* (London: Cooperation Union, 1944).

[54] For a brief account, see Morris, *F.D. Maurice*, pp. 143-4. The most influential voice in the movement was Edward Vansittart Neale, who dedicated his life to the cause of the associations; see P.N. Backstrom, *Christian Socialism and Co-operation in Victorian England: Edward Vansittart Neale and the Co-operative Movement* (London: Croom Helm, 1974).

[55] F.D. Maurice, *Reasons for Co-operation: A Lecture delivered at the Office of for Promoting Working Men's Associations* (London: Parker, 1851), p. 7.

[56] Cf. F.D. Maurice, 'On Sisterhoods', *Victoria Magazine*, August 1863.

[57] See A. Cuvillier, *P.-J. Buchez et les origines du socialisme Chrétien* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1848), and J.B. Duroselle, *Les Débats du catholicisme social en France, 1822-1870* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1951).

[58] *L'Atelier: organ special de la classe laborieuse*, November 1848(repub, in facsimile, EDHIS, Paris, 1978), A. Corbon, 'Le socialisme pratique'.

[59] See especially J.N. Figgis, *Churches in the Modern State* (London: Longmans Green, 1913).

[60] See J.N. Morris, '"Separated Brethren": French Catholics and the Oxford Movement', in S.J. Brown & P. Nockles (eds.), *The Oxford Movement: Europe and the Wider World 1830-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[61] *L'Atelier*, 7 May 1848.

[62] Cf. E. Fox Genovese & E.D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class. History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Carlyle, 'Occasional Discourse'.

[63] This is the constant theme of E.R. Norman, *The Victorian Christians Socialists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[64] Vid. E.R. Norman, *Church and Society in England 1770-1970. A Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), especially ch. 6, 'Christian Social Ideals, 1900-1920', pp. 221-78.

[65] S. Headlam, in *The Meaning of the Mass* (1896), as quoted in Walsh, 'The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist Conscience', p. 368.

[66] S. Dark (ed.), *Conrad Noel: An Autobiography* (London: Dent, 1945), p. 91.

[67] As quoted in Walsh, 'The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist Conscience', p. 369.

[68] P.D.'A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class and Social Conscience in Late Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

[69] Quoted in Norman, *Church and Society in England*, p. 234.